2: Caroe S-4 (no date) 1953 RL1 Soviet Central Asia RL1

668 they refer to the attitude of the Russian Whites in the 1918–20 period. But, given agreement that, by whatever means, all are working towards eventual independence and not for an imaginary United States of Russia, there is something to be said at this stage for treating this controversy as more concerned with tactics than with the substance of policy.

Whatever the emphasis, these ideas may seem to be the vague dreams of an embittered emigration, to be dismissed as without substance, impossible of conversion into reality in a practical world. Even in their dreams, it will be said, these men, already old and out of touch with the actual in their own country, contend violently one with another and fail even to subordinate their personal ambition to the common good. 668 This might have been the verdict before 1941.[1] But with the 127 War hard facts broke in, in the shape of many thousands of 167 Central Asian, Caucasian and other 'minority' deserters and prisoners from the Soviet armies, who fell into German hands in the first months after the German attack on Russia. At one time there were well over one million of these people in German prison camps. Many died, but many lived on to serve as legionaries against Russia. They came from all the five republics of Central Asia, from Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia and the North Caucasus, from the Volga and the Urals and from the Crimea. During nearly four years of service, they gave proof of their own capacity as soldiers and of the real attitude of the younger generation to the Russia from which they had come. It was a young emigration in mass formation. It was their tragedy that, like the Kalmucks in the XVIIIth century, they were used as pawns in the struggle of two contending empires on the chess-board of power-politics. In such a contest their own aims, however noble, could not be realized.

From Turkistan alone later interrogations established that well over half a million men either deserted to the Germans or were taken prisoner in the first year following June 1941. These were first placed in prison camps in Poland under appalling conditions, and treated as brutally as the Nazi

[1] [For background, see cat. #6, pp. 243-246 --Ansley?]

2: Caroe S-4 (no date) 1953 RL1 Soviet Central Asia RL1

régime treated all prisoners from Russia. Starvation diet was the rule, and there was no medical care. A raging typhus epidemic attacked the camps, and more than half the prisoners died of hunger, fever and general hardship. Towards the end of 1941 Mustafa Chokai and Kayum Khan, both of whom had been at first arrested by the Germans as former Soviet citizens, were released from Paris and Berlin respectively and met in Paris. They obtained the consent of the German Government to tour the prisoner-of-war camps, where they found their compatriots in the frightful conditions described and persuaded the German Ministry for Occupied Eastern Territories under Rosenberg (the Ostministerium) to organize a Commission for the classification and possible enlistment of the prisoners as volunteer legionaries in the German forces. During their tour of the camps, Chokai contracted typhus and was removed to Berlin, where he died in December 1941. The task then fell to Kayum Khan, on whom Chokai's mantle fell as Commissioner for Turkistan. Other Commissioners were appointed by the Ostministerium to deal with men from Azerbaijan, the Volga–Ural, the Caucasus and the Crimea.

Kayum's organization was on a large scale, and succeeded by the end of the war in putting as many as 180,000 men from various parts of Turkistan into one or other formation of the Wehrmacht or the Waffen-SS. It is true that the larger part of these — rather over 100,000 — were placed in labour, guard, ordnance and supply formations, but there were also at least 40,000 combatant troops, who gave on the whole a good account of themselves. The larger part of the 162nd German Infantry Division was made up of men from Turkistan, and in addition there were nineteen independent battalions and twenty-four infantry companies of which the rank and file consisted wholly of Turks and Tajiks from the east of the Caspian. These were all volunteers in the Wehrmacht. There was also a Waffen-SS formation known as the *Osttürkisches Waffenverband* (East Turkish Armed Formation) made up of four regiments of two battalions each. Of these four regiments, one was composed of men from Turkistan; the

2: Caroe S-4 (no date) 1953 RL1 Soviet Central Asia RL1

other three being from Azerbaijan, Volga–Ural and the Crimea respectively. Like so many SS units, this force (not formed until 1944) was not a combatant unit, but was designed as a collective political entity largely for purposes of propaganda. To the very end of the war the German High Command halted between two political opinions as to their treatment of the 'minority' peoples from Russia who had fallen into their hands. As regards those of Turkish race, should they organize on pan-Turkic lines, or should they make a distinction by areas? In either case, should they declare themselves behind liberation movements and in favour of the establishment of independent States, or should they aim, on conquest, at taking these people over as a new German colonial empire? Himmler inclined towards pan-Turkism and at least a declaration of German support for independence; Rosenberg was for a realistic distinction of races, and supported the recognition of independence by several areas; Hitler, with his arrogant contempt for Asiatic peoples, cared for nothing but willing service without conditions and looked to a time when the German yoke would merely replace the Soviet. The Waffen-SS formation, with its grouping of all Russian Turks in one division but with separate regiments, was a compromise between these opinions. In the end Rosenberg was authorized to declare for the recognition of the independence of Turkistan, but not until March 1945, when it was much too late to influence the behaviour of the mercenaries or to affect the issue in any way.

In the beginning things went well. Those in the prison camps had it put to them, 'Either stay where you are, or come and fight against Communism'; and all but some 20,000 of them gladly obeyed the call and volunteered for service. There was a natural desire for freedom from captivity, and it was not until the volunteers realized that the Germans had made no precise declaration of their war aims that doubts began to arise. With the encouragement of the Ostministerium, a national committee (the National Turkistan Unity Committee) was formed under Kayum and charged with the political and

2: Caroe S-4 (no date) 1953 RL1 Soviet Central Asia RL2

national leadership of the volunteers. It was expected to act as the honest broker between the men and the German Army and Party authorities. From the beginning this committee worked for German recognition of the principle of national independence for Turkistan, and on this ground was continually at variance with the German authorities and even with the German commanders of the legions. But, as the War went on, Kayum seems to have been tacitly allowed to spread the gospel of independence among the volunteers themselves both in speech and writing. It was found that without such propaganda the morale of the troops could not be sustained, and the Ostministerium, itself sympathetic, gave the committee a free hand, provided that the propaganda was limited to the volunteers themselves. This did not prevent the SS at one stage from demanding that the whole organization of Eastern Turks should submit to work under Vlassov's leadership 'for the liberation of all the peoples of Russia from the Soviet yoke'. This the committee categorically refused. But to the end, that is up to March 1945, there remained a conflict of idea: the Germans enlisted these men for the struggle against Communism, the volunteers were only willing to fight for the restoration of their independence.

This uncertainty of political aim seriously affected the volunteers' morale. The most distinguished officer of commissioned rank among them, Ghulam Alim, a former sergeant in the Red Army who had deserted, felt himself so frustrated that he fled with 200 men into the Slovakian mountains, where he was shot by partisans. This man had won every possible German decoration for bravery, including the Iron Cross, and had been promoted to command of a regiment, but he was distracted by the conflicting political influences and could not stand the course. A further reason for discontent was a narrow and mistrustful German policy in the matter of appointment and promotion of Eastern Turk officers. Almost all the officer cadres were German, more than one unit having a German element up to 15 per cent of its strength. Among 180,000 volunteers there were only eighty-seven Turkish

2: Caroe S-4 (no date) 1953 RL1 Soviet Central Asia RL 1

668 officers, out of whom thirteen held only nominal com-
727 missioned rank in the National Committee. The remaining
167 seventy-four were distributed fifty-one to the Wehrmacht and twenty-three to the SS formations. The Germans had not even the sense to draw a distinction between deserters and prisoners-of-war, and German commanders angrily attributed discontent on this score to the factious interference of the committee. The men for their part could not but regard the presence of so many Germans, even down to NCO rank, as a sign of obvious mistrust. Language difficulties were gre[illegible] and prevented understanding; the words of command were given in German, and Germans with the units made little or no attempt to learn the Asian languages. An extreme folly was the allotment of a differential scale of rations to Germans and Turks, even to those employed on similar duties within the same unit. The armament handed out consisted mainly of captured Russian weapons notoriously inferior to the German — a policy which had a severe effect on morale since the superiority of German weapons in 1941 was known to have undermined the confidence of the Red Army. It was not surprising that some 3000 desertions took place, but of these only 800 were on the Eastern Front and most of those not to the Red Army but to anti-Soviet partisans.

The Germans did undertake one interesting experiment. In response to requests for religious instruction arrangements were made to attach an *imam* to every unit. Some of these were found from among the personnel in the units themselves, while others were trained in two schools which the German government opened in Dresden and in Göttingen. The Dresden school was intended mainly to train priests for the Waffen-SS formation and, as might be expected from its aims and from the association with it of that old fox El Hajj Amin Hussaini, ex-Mufti of Jerusalem (then in Germany), it tended to subordinate spiritual to political aims and to preach a refined form of pan-Turkic pan-Islamism. The Göttingen theological school was a more genuine attempt to provide for spiritual needs, and one less corrupted by purely political ends

2: Caroe S-4 (no date) 1953 RL1 Soviet Central Asia RL1

and catchwords. Some idea of the difference of approach between the two schools, and incidentally of the crudity of German ideas on subjects such as these, can be gathered from the reports. There was hot argument on the point whether it is necessary to draw distinctions between a training in Sunniism and one in Shiism. The Dresden school, influenced apparently by its orthodox Sunni advisers, seems to have flatly announced that Shiism does not really exist, while that at Göttingen was constrained to observe that the people of Turkistan are no doubt all Sunnis, but the majority of the Azeris, like the Persians, are Shiahs, and history demonstrates the lack of understanding between the two.

Religious services and teaching were in great demand in the units and the imams did much to strengthen morale. Experience showed that their ministrations were desired by all of every age-group, including the youngest men. The scheme had of course in it a strong element of exploitation of spiritual needs to serve a worldly end; its welcome suggests a condition of spiritual hunger among the volunteers such as only Soviet propaganda can induce.

In spite of all the German mistakes of principle and practice, in spite of the frequent crudity of method and the general inability of the German officer to give that emotional touch to his relations with men of another race which can alone command the devotion of Asian troops, it can be said that on the whole these Eastern Turkish and Caucasian mercenaries served their new masters not so unfaithfully to the end. Three battalions from Turkistan fought to the last man in front of Stalingrad, others were destroyed in fierce fighting in the Caucasus, six battalions held up the Russian advance for a time in front of Berlin. Altogether they suffered losses in killed of some 50,000 men, and 12,000 war disablements — figures against which the numbers of desertions sink into insignificance. They proved good soldiers with a child-like trust in their officers if these tried to understand them and treat them well. Where there is record of close personal relations being established between officers and men, these Turks were capable

2: Caroe S-4 (no date) 1953 RL1 Soviet Central Asia RL2

of extreme devotion, as when a battalion which had broken out of a pocket near Kharkov re-entered it in order to rescue the body of a German commander who had won the affection and respect of his men. Most of them showed astonishing powers of endurance and a flair for guerrilla fighting. It was noticed that, Communist or not in upbringing, the youth of Turkistan was always influenced by a national tradition inculcated in family life. This tradition, which often had a religious background and remained a living one within the family, had made the youth sceptical of Communist teaching and ready to welcome those who could speak to them of what they could better understand. There was evidence too that in the Red Army the Muslim peoples had had a raw deal; they disliked the Russian mentality and felt aggrieved. Those who were better educated had in mind the purges and the waves of arrests and banishments which followed any demonstration of national pride; the rank and file recalled bitterly the deprivation of lands and flocks which had gone with collectivization. Those Russian cruelties they would never forget; the bloody eyes[1] of Skobelev, Kuropatkin and the Commissars were for them the eye of a single ogre, who would not leave them in peace. It was fortunate for the Allied cause that the Germans proved so heavy-handed. The inevitable impression is that the Germans did not deserve to have such men to lead. They used them only to serve a German purpose; when totalitarian Germany fell, she dragged down her mercenaries with her. The path was uncharted and there was no clear direction for men who sought anxiously for a goal. In the end most of the volunteers who did not perish were by Allied agreement handed back to their old masters, and disappeared. Cast to and fro between two tyrannical forces, lacking a home and refused understanding, often tortured when not killed, for them the end was bitterness.

Some have remained in the West after all was over. These include Kayum Khan, the leading spirit and the firmest of the national committee, and some of his helpers, as well as a number

[1] An allusion to Skobelev's cognomen, *gēṭ kanli* — bloody-eyes.

2: Caroe S-4 (no date) 1953 RL1 Soviet Central Asia RL1

of members of the national committees who dealt with volunteers from other minorities within Soviet Russia, in particular those from the North Caucasus and Azerbaijan. These continue to be the most prominent representatives of the new Muslim emigration from the USSR. They are in a strong position as against the older emigration, in that they have now an intimate sense of the hopes and fears, the elations and disappointments, of a great mass of their countrymen who had risked and often given their lives for what they thought their aim and duty — the liberation of their country from the Russian yoke. In their persons they have renewed the experience which inspired men like Togan and Chokai in the old days of the interregnum period of 1918 to 1924. Once more they have failed to realize their dreams; Hitler's Germany, though they had no chance to look elsewhere, was not the helper that they needed. Yet what happened shows at least that a strong spirit of independence had survived a quarter-century of Soviet rule and still lived in the hearts of thousands of the youth brought up in Communist schools.

It is not surprising that Soviet Russia after the war should bend so much energy to the suppression of all signs of nationalism among the kinsmen of these men in Turkistan.

There is one aspect of these events of some further significance. We know how the Soviets had divided the Eastern Turkish peoples into separate units on an ostensibly racial and linguistic basis — the policy of cantonization. The name of Turkistan disappeared from the Russian map in 1924. Later measures in the linguistic field, and the introduction of separate Roman and later Cyrillic scripts for each republic, intensified local idiosyncrasies and hampered mutual understandings. The ban on religion in education weakened such unifying effect as might have accrued from common religious thought. We have seen, too, how the Germans tended to the other extreme, and, while halting between two opinions, were inclined to flirt with ideas of pan-Turkism. The national

2: Caroe S-4 (no date) 1953 RL1 Soviet Central Asia RL1

The national

668 committee under Kayum Khan's direction followed a middle course. They stood for a single united Turkistan, including the Persian-speaking Tajiks, roughly coincident with the limits of the five Soviet Central Asian republics, and they strove to inculcate the political idea of a common Turkistani nationality and allegiance. Unwilling to recognize that the several languages spoken in Turkistan are in fact languages and not mere dialects of one language, they tried to serve their end by inventing a middle-language — *ortatili* — which should become a lingua franca for all the country. They also did their best to encourage the German commanders to mix up the rank and file without regard to racial or linguistic affinities, making no distinction between an Uzbek or a Kazak, a Kirghiz or a Tajik. Their aim was a deliberate one, to counter the Russian policy of breaking down into small units and to re-create a common tradition for Turkistan. On the other hand they would have nothing to do with suggestions for a wider Turkish organism which should be shared with Azerbaijanis, Volga Tatars or Bashkurds. They stood for a smaller unity, confined to Turkistan alone.

ooo It is not easy to pronounce with confidence how far this policy is consonant with realities. On the one hand it was • [321] noted that the Azeris, the only substantial people of Turkish stock in the Caucasus area, proved to be better combatant troops than any of the volunteers from Turkistan. This result may be partly attributable to the fact that, being alone, the Azeris were not mixed with other stocks and knew how they stood. The mingling of the five main stocks of Turkistan without any regard for origin or language must have produced a result not unlike what would follow if Pathans, Baluches, Panjabis and Awans were thrown together haphazard in the army of what is now Pakistan. It was a bold experiment and it can hardly have promoted efficiency, at least at the outset. On the other hand there is evidence that Uzbeks and Tajiks at any rate get on well together. (The Soviet attempt to play up the Persian character of the Tajik tradition is probably misconceived: Tajiks are often bilingual in any case.) As

364 the cleanliness of the households or the streets, nor about the purity of the water flowing through the streets. All refuse is thrown out into the [64] street or into the aryk. As a result both the air and the water are infected and transmit, one must suppose, those epidemic diseases which exist among the natives of Turkestan (leprosy, Sart disease (a skin disease), dracontiasis, 727 goiter). In general /391/ our military administration in Turkestan has never billeted army detachments in the native towns and villages, first, because of the poor construction of the [60] houses, and secondly because of the aloofness of the population, who have not yet mixed at all with the conquerors, and who, according to their religious law, almost never permit strangers to enter their dwellings.

727 The Russians, in cases of necessity,
712 occupy only such native dwellings as those which are confiscated and can be made suitable for European habitation. In most cases they have occupied the homes of former rulers or begs who have fled, and whose property consequently has been turned over to the treasury.

712 These dwellings have been adapted either as barracks or as military hospitals. The adaptation has consisted of putting in large windows, installing ventilation, and so on. The Russians who occupied Tashkent built barracks for the army in the native manner, i.e., with the framework type of construction. But they soon discarded this system and began to build both the military buildings and the living quarters of unfired clay, laid in a regular manner.